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NSC BRIEFING

4 May 1955

BACKGROUND--VOTING FOR ITALIAN PRESIDENT

I. Constitution provides election of new president every seven years.

A. President is elected by both houses of parliament, (total: 833) plus representatives from each of Italy's 19 "Regions", specially elected by each regional council in proportion to local party strength.

B. Because only four "regions" have been established since constitution drawn up in 1948, only ten regional "electors" voted on this occasion: three each from Sicily, Sardinia, and South Tyrol; plus a single "elector" from Aosta Valley, which rates only one.

C. Vote is by secret ballot: two-thirds majority (562 of total possible 843) is required to win on first three ballots, after that, an absolute majority (422) sufficient.

II. Candidates for presidency in 1955 election were:

A. Luigi Einaudi, Italy's President from 1948 to 1955. He was originally supported by Premier Scelba's center faction of CD's, plus minor democratic parties.

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1. Supporters believed a non-CD President could better represent the coalition government.

B. Cesare Merzagora, an Independent who was elected deputy in 1953 on CD ticket. He was the official CD candidate, but was opposed by minor parties and CD center as being a crypto-CD.

1. Apparently also opposed by right and left CD's as not being CD enough.

C. Giovanni Gronchi, a Christian Democrat and president of chamber of deputies. He was the candidate of extreme "left" faction of CD's.

D. Ferruccio Parri, a former Action Party Premier (1945), now considered non-party man. He removed his support from De Gasperi's center coalition government at time of '53 elections, in protest against CD-sponsored "bonus" electoral law (general unpopularity of which was factor in government's electoral defeat).

1. He was the announced presidential candidate of both Nenni Socialists and Communists, but only as a first ballot demonstration.

III. There were four ballots.

A. On first ballot:

Parri got 308 (apparently Communists, and Nenni Socialists and some Republicans).

Merzagora--225 (apparently some CD's).

Einaudi--126 (apparently some CD's, plus minor democratic parties).

Gronchi--30 (apparently far "left" wing of CD's).

Blank ballots--89 (apparently Monarchists and neo-Fascists).

Remainder (68) scattered, void or absent.

B. On second ballot, Parri withdrew. Vote:

Merzagora--225

Einaudi--80

Gronchi--127 (gains apparently from right CD's).

Blank ballots--332 (mostly Communists and Kenni Socialists)

C. On third ballot:

Merzagora got 245 (reportedly some Monarchists).

Einaudi--61

Gronchi--281 (Kenni Socialist and some more CD's threw him their support).

Blank ballots--195 (apparently Communists).

D. On fourth ballot, Merzagora said he would withdraw.

Gronchi was elected by 658 (reportedly some Monarchists --including Covelli (leader of National Monarchist Party)--some Social Democrats and most CD's, plus Kenni Socialists and Communists. Communist last-minute switch is said to have been attempt to avoid isolation.

1. Einaudi got 70 (reportedly Liberals and some Social Democrats), and 92 blank ballots were cast (reportedly some Monarchists, and Fanfani group in CD).

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IV. Duties and powers of Italian President:

- A. Head of state; commands armed forces; declares war, on decision of parliament.
- B. May dissolve one or both chambers, except during last six months of term.
- C. Nominates Premier (although Premier's actual investment depends on formal parliamentary approval).
- D. Can veto laws on own initiative.
- E. No other acts of the President are valid unless countersigned by the Ministers proposing them, who thereby assume responsibility for them.

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